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SUBJECT: CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL SPEAKER HIGHLIGHTS
COLOMBIA'S POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE BIOFUELS DEVELOPMENT

REF: BOGOTA 5657

11. SUMMARY: With funding from the Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs (EEB), Embassy Bogota hosted the visit of Conservation International Senior Research Scientist Timothy J. Killeen to Colombia September 26-28 to speak about the sustainable development of biofuels. As part of the three-day visit, Dr. Killeen met with environmental activists, biofuels producers, and government officials as well as visited an ethanol production facility in Cali and an

African palm farm and biodiesel plant under development in Meta Department. Dr. Killeen capped the visit with a public presentation to approximately 150 students, faculty, local media and business leaders at the Universidad Autonoma de Occidente in Cali. Throughout his visit, Dr. Killeen expressed optimism about Colombia's potential to sustainably develop its biofuels sector without harming the environment. He urged the public and private sectors to work closely on preparing a comprehensive land management strategy for biofuels as well as pursuing international certifications for biofuels produced in Colombia. Dr. Killeen's remarks were carried in both the national daily El Tiempo and the leading financial newspaper Portafolio. END SUMMARY.

Meetings with Environmental, Producer and Government Officials

2, On September 26, Dr. Killeen attended three separate roundtables with environmental, producer and GOC officials, respectively, to discuss the potential for sustainable development of biofuels in Colombia. Representatives from the Nature Conservancy, the Humboldt Center, the World Wildlife Fund, and the local office of Conservation International outlined their efforts to coordinate with African palm and sugar producers on establishing environmental principles for biodiesel and ethanol production. Although some environmental representatives expressed concern that displacement of cattle grazing or other agricultural crops to environmentally sensitive areas might occur as production of feedstocks for biofuels increased, they acknowledged the GOC's strong public commitment to limit biofuels production to areas already in agricultural use or on degraded lands. Dr. Killeen encouraged the environmental community to seek out areas of cooperation with biofuels producers on land management and shared principles rather than focus efforts on seeking legislative prescriptions that would be difficult to enforce and could hamper the positive impact of biofuels to generate rural employment and reduce carbon emissions.

3, In discussions with the Federation of Palm Producers (FEDEPALMA) and the Association of Sugar Producers (ASOCANA), Dr. Killeen stressed the positive benefits of seeking international certifications of compliance with environmental, labor, and quality standards. He noted that if negative biofuels production practices, or even a perception of such practices, took root they could doom the industry to endless struggles with the environmental community. He therefore strongly encouraged producers to continue efforts to develop agreed production practices with the environmental community that addressed budding concerns about preventing deforestation, protecting biodiversity and promoting sound land management. In his follow-on meeting with the Vice Minister of Environment Claudia Martinez, National Biofuels Coordinator Arturo Infante and technical representatives of the Ministries of Energy, Agriculture and Planning, Dr. Killeen urged the GOC to incorporate input from the environmental community and private sector as it develops a national biofuels strategy.

Presentation

14. On September 27, Dr. Killeen underscored the same themes in his address to approximately 150 students, faculty, ethanol producers, and members of the local media at the Universidad Autonoma de Occidente (Autonomous University of the West) in Cali. Following the speech, audience members asked questions about the alleged threat biofuels production posed to food supplies, the potential for biofuels to cause deforestation, and the prospects for second-generation cellulosic biofuels. Dr. Killeen reiterated that existing scientific data refutes the premise that biofuels threatens the world's food supply, though demand for certain feedstocks could lead to higher consumer prices for particular foods. He also said that sound land management policy, developed

through consultation with civil society and the environmental community, could mitigate dangers of deforestation. Finally, he described cellulosic biofuels as a quickly approaching reality which will unlock the full potential of biofuels to serve as major source of energy. He urged Colombian biofuels producers to begin preparing for cellulosic biofuels production. His commentary on biofuels was carried in October 2 editions of both El Tiempo and Portafolio.

Site Visits

15. In addition to the public diplomacy program, Post organized site visits for Dr. Killeen to a sugar-based ethanol plant outside of Cali and an African palm-based plant under development in San Juan de Guaroa in Meta Department. Dr. Killeen toured both facilities and the surrounding agricultural cultivation areas as part of his assessment of the potential for Colombia's biofuels sector to develop in a sustainable and environmentally responsible manner.

Comment

16. Dr. Killeen's assessment that the GOC can develop an economically viable biofuels sector while holding to its commitment to confine production to degraded lands or areas already in agricultural production is important in ascertaining Colombia's long-term potential to sustainably generate rural employment, reduce carbon emissions, and diversify its energy supply through biofuels. His messages on pursuing international certifications, promoting public-private cooperation, and preparing the Colombian biofuels industry for second-generation cellulosic biofuels also resonated with audiences. Finally, his presentations aided in disabusing misperceptions about biofuels, including concerns about food security and land management.

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